Football Premiership: West Ham United 2 Manchester United 2

Slipshod champions lose their grip

David Lacey

MANCHESTER United, their place in the European Cup quarter-finals secure, turned to domestic matters on Sunday only to find West Ham United reluctant to be cast in the role of doormats. A win for Alex Ferguson's team at Upton Park would have enabled them to rejoin the leading pack in the Premiership but no sooner was victory in their grasp than it was whisked away by two late goals in two minutes.

Anything less than a draw would have been scant reward for the imaginative attacking football West Ham produced throughout. But for the bulk of the match this was not reflected in their finishing and, when an inspired piece of football from Cantona set up Solskjaer for Manchester United's first goal, to be followed by a typically audacious second from Beckham, it looked as if the game would be won more in the spirit of the wages snatch than the carefully planned bank raid.

This was West Ham's fourth draw in five league matches and they have not won in the Premiership since beating Blackburn at the end of October. However, this performance offered them more encouragement than the bare facts of the result, not least because Harry Redknapp's much criticised Romanian pair Dumitrescu and Raducioiu looked more like the players they had been in the 1994 World Cup.

Dumitrescu began the game, with his compatriot on the bench, but it was Redknapp's decision to bring on Raducioiu, soon after West Ham had fallen behind, which eventually increased the pressure on Manchester United's defenders during the last quarter-hour. West Ham will now expect the pair to imagine they are playing the champions every week.



Still no delight for Dowie . . . West Ham's Ian Dowie attempts to end his goal drought as he challenges for the ball with Manchester United teamates David May and Peter Schmeichel PHOTOGRAPH: TOM JENKINS

Not that Manchester United looked much like champions. Injuries in Vienna four days earlier had deprived them of Gary Neville in defence and Keane and Butt in central midfield. Hard though McClair worked, he is no Keane, and the Irishman's pace and strength were badly missed as West Ham hustled, harried and pursued their opponents between the penalty areas.

For all their possession and territorial advantages West Ham still needed luck at the right time if they were to turn their first-half superiority into goals. Their shooting remained distant and awry; their final passes lacked the crucial element of surprise; Dowie toiled honestly but in vain.

Before half-time the Manchester United attack remained more a matter of theory than practice. Little was seen of Giggs or Cantona and even less of Poborsky, who on being presented with the sight of Dicks advancing on him with the ball appeared to decide that Christmas was a more enticing prospect at that point than a tackle.

Yet West Ham were warned in the 40th minute what the consequences of their failure to score might be. Cantona headed Giggs's cross on to Solskjaer, who controlled the ball with a flick and a nudge before bringing Miklosko into urgent action for the first time, the West Ham goalkeeper turning the shot around a post.

The portent was not false. Eight minutes into the second half Cantona's superb through pass sent Solskjaer clear of a square defence to draw Miklosko before beating him with a low shot. As Dumitrescu swerved past two defenders before driving the ball a fraction wide of the far post West Ham looked far from defeated but in the 75th minute Phil Neville, who had replaced Poborsky, delivered a pass to Beckham in the penalty arc who scored another memorable goal, chipping the ball into the top left-hand corner of the net.

With Bilic forced off by flu — not that this had spared the Croatian a first-half caution for a crude foul on Beckham — West Ham appeared done for. They had scored only 13 league goals all season and now they were two down with time running out.

Then it all changed. In the 77th minute Raducioiu spun past Johnsen on the left and, with Schmeichel anticipating a shot inside his near post, drove the ball past the goalkeeper into the far corner.

Two minutes later, Dumitrescu's through-pass found Hughes sprinting clear of the last defender. Schmeichel brought him down, Dicks put away the penalty as only Dicks can and suddenly West Ham were blowing bubbles again, leaving Ferguson and his team feeling a little flat.

"We didn't deserve to win," said the Manchester United manager gallantly, "and West Ham at least deserved a draw." But if Old Trafford wants to make a serious impact in the Premiership, United will not want to make a habit of losing two-goal leads.

Cryptic crossword by Araucaria

Across

1 Mr Mop, shaggy, dishevelled, to beat record? (11)
9 London palace of 1 down's 19 (7)
10 Some hair specialists with some ornament for a hat (7)
11 Haggler who wins another medal like the first? (9)
12 I am a carrier and am taking everything back (5)
13 Romance pursued by female willingly (4)
14 1 down's badly grazed and sore from something sharp (5'1,4)
16 Little beast, about one of five, in drapery (10)
19 Queen Elizabeth the first? (4)
21 Old blast by jolly good fellow (5)
22 Big story about saint at jewel of a church (9)
24 Empty with silencer (7)
25 Request to an establishment gets a funny look (7)
26 In unobtrusive energy, sailors and soldiers are as we like them these days (6,5)

Down

1 I wrote for the county. Your Majesty: I feel sick at heart (8,7)
2 Beast's desire to be included in the big guns (5)
3 Hell is red stuff under the earth (7)
4 Lake not supplied by a river in Spain (7)
5 Getting no water to wash away real sins (8)
6 Wander vacantly with a tanner from 1 down (4,3,8)
7 Highball drunk by Miss Universe? (6)
8 See 23
15 Advance theory supporting sterling? (8)
16 Character from a short story by 1 down (6)
17 Knight no longer errant yet in Queer Street? (7)
18 Uranium extracted from titanium could be phoney (7)
20 According to Wordsworth our birth is dead (6)
23,8 Mud on shoe, English work of 1 down (5,3,3)

Last week's solution

L		A		A		S		B		M		H		B
I	N	D	I	C	A	T	O	R		O	D	O	U	R
G		V		U		I		O		O		N		E
H	E	A	R	T	E	N		G	O	N	D	O	L	A
T		N		E		G		U		S		U		T
N	I	C	K		F	R	E	E	C	H	U	R	C	H
I		E		U		A				I				I
N	O	S	E	G	A	Y		M	A	N	S	I	O	N
G				L				A		E		N		G
S	T	O	N	Y	B	R	O	K	E		O	D	D	S
T		F		A		E		E		B		I		P
R	E	F	U	S	A	L		G	E	O	R	G	I	A
I		D		S		I		O		G		E		C
K	H	A	K	I		E	L	O	Q	U	E	N	C	E
E		Y		N		F		D		S		T		S

Tennis

Money and power but little drama

Stephen Bierley in Munich

BORIS BECKER began the year with victory in the Australian Open and ended it in triumph in Munich on Sunday, beating Goran Ivanisevic 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 in the season's final tournament, the Grand Slam Cup.

Ivanisevic had beaten Becker six times before Sunday but on this occasion he never had a prayer. The 29-year-old German was in imperious form, particularly on his serve which the Croatian, who had won here last year, failed to come even close to breaking at any time.

Ivanisevic nearly pulled out of the tournament but apparently could not find the referee to tell him he was sick. A good night's sleep pulled him around and on Sunday, as beaten finalist, he became richer by $812,500, while Becker won nearly $2 million.

Ivanisevic was undoubtedly a little weary after his five-set semi-final victory over the Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov on Saturday but Becker was totally dominant. A single break in each set was enough for the German. Tim Henman had given him an altogether tougher time in Saturday's other semi-final.

There are no ranking points for the Grand Slam Cup. If there were, Henman would have leapt several places, although his end-of-year position of 29 is testimony to the



Becker . . . imperious form

progress the British No 1 has made in the last 12 months. Last year he finished 99th.

There were times in the first set and a half when Henman genuinely troubled Becker with both the velocity and range of his shots. For all of that, the possibility of an upset was negligible.

Henman banked $440,000 for reaching the last four, doubling his prize-money for the year. However, the most valuable aspect for the week was undoubtedly the experience of playing Becker.

Henman had earlier beaten Michael Stich and MaliVai Washington, both ranked in the top 20. "It emphasised to myself that I can definitely play with some of the best players. What I need to do now is compete against the very best and that's something you just can't change overnight."

The Guardian Weekly

Vol 155, No 25
Week ending December 22, 1996

Europe sets terms for single currency

John Palmer and Michael White in Dublin

THE Dublin summit last week struck a crucial compromise on the road to monetary union, which paved the way for the launch of a single European currency on January 1, 1999 — but left John Major's Britain trailing defiantly in its wake.

As smaller European Union states, led by the Irish presidency, brokered an agreement between France and Germany on the new currency "stability and growth pact", European officials proudly revealed their winning design for the first euro banknotes.

The summit clears the way for a major political drive in the New Year to convince wavering public opinion in Germany, France and other countries to back monetary union — if the 1999 timetable can be met.

Mr Major conceded the other EU countries were making "Herculean efforts" to meet the 1999 deadline but said he was "very doubtful" that they would. Faced with rampant hostility to the euro from many Tory MPs, Mr Major balanced positive support for some EU initiatives with dire warnings that the Union could be "blown wide open" if states favouring closer integration insisted that others follow their lead later.

There had been fears a failure to agree the stability pact might have triggered doubts about the political will to keep to the 1999 timetable and the risk of currency turbulence on international financial markets.

The stability pact will hand far-reaching powers to the EU Council of Ministers to determine the fate of countries that take part in the single currency. If a country taking part in economic and monetary union breaks the terms of the single currency pact, the council could impose huge financial penalties.

Although all countries that join the monetary union will be expected to run balanced budgets, they will be allowed to run deficits of up to 3 per cent of GDP in any year. They will be permitted to exceed these limits only if they can show that they are victims of "temporary and exceptional circumstances".

But the difficult question was just how severe a normal economic crisis would have to be before a country with an "excessive deficit" was accorded a similar indulgence. The answer agreed in Dublin was that a country would have to show that it suffered an annual fall of real GDP of 2 per cent or more. In recent decades there have been only a dozen or so examples of countries hit by such a severe drop in output.

A country pleading for special treatment will still have to show that its circumstances are "nevertheless exceptional". In a binding political declaration, EU governments have agreed that this will normally only require an annual fall in GDP of at least 0.75 per cent.

The tortuous compromise is designed to alleviate fears, particularly in Germany, that the single currency might be too soft, and to prove that the EU will be tough on countries running up huge deficits. But by carefully ensuring that the final word on sanctions remains a matter for political decision, the pact can be presented in France and elsewhere as a defeat for the idea of automatic sanctions.

None of the provisions of the stability pact will apply to countries which do not join the single currency. But the strict financial targets set for acceptable budget deficits are bound to influence the attitude of the international financial markets towards non-EMU countries judged to be spendthrift.

Comment, page 8



LITTLE progress on the problems of Central Africa was achieved at a summit of African leaders in Nairobi on Monday after Zaire stayed away and Nelson Mandela put in only a brief appearance, *writes Chris McGreal*. Rebels who now control large areas of eastern Zairean and Burundi's military regime were not invited.

One element of the regional upheaval continued along the road to resolution this week, as Tanzanian troops drove thousands of Rwandan refugees back to their homeland. Refugees (pictured above) began a long walk home from the Benaco refugee camp in Tanzania.

The United Nations estimates that about 300,000 Hutus have crossed the border since the forced repatriation by the Tanzanian government, which has ordered all Rwandan refugees out before the end of the year.

Rwanda's president, Pasteur Bizimungu, drove to the frontier to welcome the reluctant returnees, who say they fear persecution by the mainly Tutsi army in revenge for the 1994 genocide. "I came to reassure them that nothing bad will happen," he said. But many others, including Hutu extremist militiamen who led the genocide, are believed to be still in their camps or fleeing away from the border.

Kofi Annan to lead UN into next century

Mark Tran in New York

KOFI ANNAN of Ghana has been picked as the next secretary-general of the United Nations after France dropped its opposition to a man who has spent almost half his life at the UN.

The end of a week-long impasse in the Security Council, caused by a French *Non* in a round of straw polls, was announced by the British envoy, Sir John Weston, outside the council last week. The appointment has to be confirmed by a vote in the General Assembly.

France objected to Mr Annan because he could not speak French, but ended its veto after behind-the-scenes arm-twisting by some of the UN's most powerful members.

The outgoing secretary-general, the Egyptian Boutros Boutros-Ghali, said he was pleased that Africa would have a second five-year term at the helm. Mr Annan was nominated because the United States vetoed a second term for Mr Boutros-Ghali.

The choice of Mr Annan caps a 30-year career in the organisation that has given the 58-year-old Ghanaian an intimate knowledge of the UN, from budgetary matters to peacekeeping.

Mr Annan has enjoyed a steady rise through the UN bureaucracy. It was the Bosnia conflict which first thrust him into the public eye. Although he was criticised by some for a lack of charisma, his coolness under fire and his straightforward style earned him the respect of those who dealt with him. He is currently under-secretary-general for peacekeeping, a position he has held since 1993.

Washington Post, page 12

Because of distribution problems over the holiday season, we are publishing next week's issue with this one.

Austria	AS30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF75	Netherlands	G 4.75
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 400	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,000	Switzerland	SF 3.30

Falkland islanders reply in kind to Argentine charm offensive



The peace offering . . . Saint-Exupéry's The Little Prince

John Ezard

A WAR of children's fairy stories has broken out between the Falkland Islands and Argentina. It was launched from Buenos Aires by the foreign minister, Guido di Tella, author of a longstanding charm offensive aimed at the islanders.

As previous Christmas presents, he has sent all 2,200 islanders photographs of his grandchildren; videos of penguins; and postcards of Patagonia. This year, every child has received a copy of the French author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic book The Little Prince. Its hero lives on a tiny planet but roams the universe seeking the gift of muzzles to stop sheep devouring his highly conceited pet rose.

Diplomatically, its message is obscure. Islanders have roses as well as sheep but find garden fences keep the two satisfactorily apart. But the subtext is clear: happiness lies in sharing what you have, so travel widely and tell your parents to share with us.

Mr Di Tella said last week: "The story has an idealistic message which we must maintain in our hearts. I just want to get along on human terms with the islanders."

Reaction has been less than grateful. One resident, Nicola Crowle, responded in a letter to Penguin News: "Not only can we read well but we all learned the story of the Trojan horse as children."

Now islanders have replied in kind. Wendy Teggart, a councillor, has sent Mr Di Tella a copy of Roald Dahl's The BFG (Big Friendly Giant). Underlined is a passage in which the BFG tries to pacify the dreaded nocturnal People-Eating Giants by feeding them foul-tasting snozzcumbers: "'Eating human beans [beings] is wrong and evil', the BFG said. 'It is guzzly and glumptious', shouted the Bloodbottler Giant, 'And tonight I is galloping off to Chile to swobble a few human Chile beans . . . I is fed up with the taste of Esquimos. I is very fond indeed of English schoolchiddlers. They has a nice inky-booky flavour'."

The passage suggests Argentina — to islanders at least — and a reopening of its Beagle Channel dispute with Chile. Subtext: thanks, but be kind to little people or BFJM (Big Friendly John Major) will make you eat snozzcumbers.

Right stuff needed to fight corruption in Italy

IT IS not surprising that there may be a few bones, even if not a complete skeleton, in Antonio Di Pietro's cupboard (Dragged down by the Italian job, December 8). The Italian administrative and procedural set-up has long been a maze of intricate, mutually inconsistent and often absurd norms, so that (even discounting plain corruption) it is impossible for anyone to do anything without breaking the law.

The task of reforming public administration is not beyond the ability of even moderately rational human beings, but there are two main reasons why Italian politicians have never been seriously interested in it.

The first is that opportunities for corruption are increased, since there is always some regulation or ordinance allowing a clever lawyer to maintain that their clients' actions were not corrupt. Second, corruption in Italy was (and still is) all-pervasive, because, unlike Britain where it is a prerogative, almost a privilege, of those with power and authority, it has been allowed by the Italian political class to take root in administrative practices at all levels in the full knowledge that any drive against corruption would, therefore, become pointless.

Di Pietro is indeed a conservative, a "natural man of the right". His dedicated fight against graft, had it been led from the left, might have been easily discounted as normal political infighting. Led from the right, it was bound to make him appear almost unique, given the traditional propensity of Italian conservatives for corruption. It gave him enormous prestige and real power to damage his targets. Hence their present relentless attempts at delegitimation and character assassination. Italy needs honest conservatives more than it needs honest radicals: Di Pietro may be down, but he is certainly not out.
(Prof) Giovanni Carsaniga,
Department of Italian,
University of Sydney, NSW, Australia

Taking a close look at Africa

IN MY role as a historian and Africanist who struggles to make my own small contribution to our better understanding of the non-Western world, I appreciate those in the world of journalism who pursue the same goal.

Two recent articles from November 24 embody both the rewards and frustrations of this endeavour. Dominique Franche's piece on Rwanda was a masterful exploration of the roots of crisis in Central Africa, emphasising the historical origins of ethnic categories as well as conflicts over access to critical resources that lie at the heart of the problems.

So far so good. But Paul Brown's "Food Grown for the White Man's Table" is a step backward. In identifying the harm done by globalising the world food economy, his heart seems to be in the right place. But there were some glaring errors.

At one point he mentions "the nine sub-Saharan African countries". There are many more than nine sub-Saharan countries.

A more complex mistake comes when Mr Brown describes conversion of productive land in Africa from subsistence to cash crops as a recent development. In fact, this has been going on for more than a century and — especially in West Africa — sometimes has been initiated by local small-scale entrepreneurs, and to their advantage. The process has accelerated in recent years, with less positive results for indigenous people; but addressing a contemporary problem is harder with a faulty grasp of its character and origins.

Mr Brown concludes by stating that appropriate land-use strategies and new technologies to "improve grain harvests 30-fold" would enable the world to potentially support 8 billion people. The wisdom and desirability of such a future escapes me. The overall point is that when framed by misstatements and unexamined assumptions, even an admirable message will not be well-received.
Thomas Johnson,
Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Clinton exploits imperfect system

AN EDITORIAL on the US presidential election referred to "the paradox of victory for a Democratic president while his party fails to win back the House or Senate" (November 17). The paradox is not only apparent, but is an artefact of the political system in the United States, which fully shares the Anglo-Saxon fear of proportional representation. The arbitrary grouping of voters in Congressional districts skewed the results of the popular vote. Democrats got 51 per cent of the Congressional vote nationally, while the GOP got only 47 per cent, thereby constituting only a minority of a minority: the 47 per cent of the 49 per cent who voted. President Clinton ran ahead of the Republicans, but behind his own ticket. These facts are not widely reported.
Jeffry Larson,
Hamden, Connecticut, USA

I FIND Martin Walker usually to be insightful with his outsider's view of what happens here in the US.

However, in his column of December 1, in discussing a potentially interesting division in the Democratic Party, he fell into the same trap as many journalists who report on public opinion research — confusing focus groups with polls.

Using the word poll to describe focus group research implies that the so-called data obtained are definitive and conclusive. This is hardly the case. As a long-time practitioner of marketing research I have often conducted focus groups for clients.

However, I have always warned that they are *neither conclusive nor definitive*. They help (often considerably) in building important hypotheses. Ideas should not be confused with data; they are related but they are not the same.
Eugene Telser,
San Diego, California, USA

Israel's prisoners of the past

LET US stop pussyfooting about. We are all prisoners of our past, and Netanyahu's past lies from Jabotinski through Begin and Shamir to Rabin's assassin.

While I was helping to defend the Jewish quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem during the War of Independence, the brave soldiers of Begin and Shamir in Irgun and Lechi were murdering the defenceless inhabitants of the Arab village of Deir Yasin, intending to create panic and to cause as many Arabs as possible to flee their homes and leave the land available for Jewish occupation.

The symbol of Irgun, a rifle held over the map of greater Israel, Palestine, the Golan and much of Jordan, portrays the ambition of the right wing in Israel — all of this area should be opened to Jewish settlers to establish the state.

Therefore the only course open to him is the establish homelands on the South African model and maintain an occupation force to contain them. This is not the Israel we fought for 50 years ago.
Yohanan Ben-Zvi,
Auckland, New Zealand

IT SEEMS hard, this comparison between the Bad Netanyahu and the sainted Rabin/Peres. After all, it wasn't Netanyahu who massacred villagers in Lebanon earlier this year; it wasn't Netanyahu who triggered a round of bombings with an assassination in Gaza; it wasn't Netanyahu who made the original decision not to withdraw from Hebron. Yet it is Netanyahu who is being set up to take the rap for the failure of the so-called "peace process".

One needs very acute vision and an affinity for fine lines to draw distinctions between the various Israeli governments. They all follow the same basic policy; if Netanyahu has approved new land expropriations in the West Bank, so did every one of his predecessors; if Netanyahu has fired on unarmed demonstrators, so did every one of his predecessors. A superficial change of government could not have damaged a peace process that was not fatally flawed to begin with.
Clifford Story,
West Ryde, NSW, Australia

All about myself

CHARLOTTE RAVEN'S article (Me, Myself and I, November 17) presented feminism from an élitist perspective. Who is the "we" she's talking about? Maybe best-selling feminist writers are all emphasising the personal lately, but Raven totally ignores the deeply political, feminist work women are involved in at a grassroots level.

Her feminism reeks of an academic/mainstream feminism that many women now reject or totally ignore. Madonna? Only rich, middle-class women have the time to devote to analysing Madonna's life from a feminist perspective. Many other feminists don't care.

Raven makes it sound as though no women are fighting for the rights of women any more. That's really an insult to the many women who put their lives on the line to fight for political issues every day.

I suggest if Raven really doesn't want to "give up on the politics" then she should stop writing cute articles that generalise feminist attitudes and get out into the communities where many women — who call themselves feminists — are fighting for their political rights. The political is still alive in feminism it's just a matter of wading through the muck to get there.
Karen Brody,
Nairobi, Kenya

Briefly

REFERRING to your article "Iraq agrees to deal on oil for food" (December 1), I notice the beginning of the article refers to "UN conditions", but the last paragraph states "Diplomats said Washington was currently studying the latest pricing formula, etc". Does this mean the UN has actually moved from New York to Washington, or that the UN can do nothing without US approval?
A Simons,
Camp Hill, Queensland, Australia

I WAS appalled and disgusted with the contribution made by Ewart Wooldridge of the South Bank Centre to the conference on cultural institutions and their attraction for homeless people (Cultural centres act as community police, December 1). Mr Ewart, representing Britain, said: "However excellent the concert you attend, your evening is ruined if you have to clamber over a homeless person as you come out." Above all other problems homeless people face in their daily lives, prejudice is probably the most difficult to cope with.
Kerrie Devanney,
Canberra, Australia

THE genetic structure of soya has been altered so as to enable the plant to survive the very intensive use of toxins designed to kill off anything that threatens the soya plant during its growth.

While the long-term effect of eating genetically altered plants may be worrying enough, far more tangible a worry is that this product is likely to absorb and retain toxins which will then find their way into those who eat the soya produce.

Why is the British government not taking a stand?
Alistair C Blunt,
London

OVERSEAS aid cut by 8.4 per cent. What does the Budget mean to me? Deep shame to be British, and despair at the society I live in.
(Rev) Nicholas Bradbury,
Chippenham, Wiltshire

IN explaining the withdrawal of £50 million from war pensioners, the Prime Minister proclaimed to the House that this could be justified because ". . . we always listen to the experts and act accordingly".

This is an attempt to raise a smokescreen around the proliferation of ageist policies on the political agenda. During the past few weeks the Government has openly opposed the inclusion of age discrimination among the topics to be discussed at the European Inter-Governmental Conference.
Don W Steele,
Association of Retired Persons,
London

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US criticises Israel over settlements

Barry Schweid in Washington

BREAKING a long silence, President Bill Clinton publicly chided Israel on Monday for its policies on Jewish settlements on the West Bank, calling them an obstacle to Middle East peacemaking.

The Israeli cabinet decided last week to channel millions of extra dollars to the settlements. The arrangement, which will entitle settlers to generous tax concessions and government grants, could encourage Israelis to move to the occupied territories. Government officials hope the incentives will swell the number of settlers to more than 500,000 by the end of the century.

Mr Clinton's criticism was prompted by disclosure of a letter that three former US secretaries of state and five other former top officials had jointly sent to the Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, warning that his support for the settlers could have "tragic results".

Mr Clinton had taken a relatively patient and low-key approach to Mr Netanyahu and his government's policies since the Likud leader won election in May and during his own re-election campaign.

In fact, the Clinton administration had stopped a long-standing policy of referring to the settlements authorised by Labour and Likud governments as obstacles to peace. But when a reporter asked on Monday if he considered the presence of 140,000 Jews on the West Bank and in Gaza among more than 2 million Arabs an obstacle to peace, Mr Clinton snapped: "Absolutely."

The State Department and other government offices are likely to take the cue and intensify pressure on Mr Netanyahu. The prime minister has kept a promise not to start new settlements but irritated the Palestinians by reviving subsidies and tax breaks for Jews on the West Bank and in Gaza after a four-year lapse.

The Palestinians want the Israelis to leave the territories. They intend to build on the administrative control granted them by previous Israeli Labour governments and establish a state with Jerusalem as its capital.

In his exchange with reporters at the White House, Mr Clinton said Israel and the Palestinians had agreed to leave the explosive settlements issue to the negotiating table.

Describing the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians as full of tension and frustration, Mr Clinton said he had made his concern clear to the Israelis. "I don't think anything should be done which would, in effect, be seen as pre-empting the outcome of something they've already agreed should be part of the final negotiations."

At the same time, he urged the two sides to conclude successfully their protracted negotiations to bring about a partial Israeli pullback in the West Bank town of Hebron. Otherwise, he said, the current equilibrium in the Middle East could give way.

Talks between the PLO and Israel resumed on Monday on Israeli troop redeployment from Hebron, signalling an easing of tension between the two negotiating parties.

The former secretary of state, James Baker, who conducted extensive Arab-Israeli negotiations under President Bush, said the Clinton administration had been backsliding. "We have gone from calling the settlements illegal in the Carter administration, to calling them obstacles to peace in the Reagan and Bush administrations, and now we are saying they are complicating and troubling," Mr Baker said.

Addressed to Mr Netanyahu, but intended also as a signal to Mr Clinton, the letter signed by Mr Baker and the other former officials registered concern that "unilateral actions, such as the expansion of settlements, would be strongly counterproductive to the goal of a negotiated solution".

And, the former officials of Republican and Democratic administrations said, the settlement activity "if carried forward, could halt progress made by the peace process over the last two decades", the letter said.

"Such a tragic result would threaten the security of Israel, the Palestinians, friendly Arab states and undermine US interests in the Middle East."

Among others who signed the letter were secretaries Cyrus Vance and Lawrence Eagleburger, and former national security advisers Zbigniew Brzezinski, Brent Scowcroft and Frank Carlucci.

Past administrations have criticised Israeli settlements as obstacles to peace. The Clinton administration had taken a softer approach, describing settlements as unhelpful. — *AP*

● The leading arm of the pro-Israel lobby in the US has suffered a sharp legal setback, required by an appeal court ruling to disclose the sources of its funds and how the money is spent.

The blow comes just as the Arab press has launched a strident campaign against the new US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright.

Washington Post, page 11



A woman wades through flood water in the outskirts of India's southern city of Madras. Thousands of homes were submerged during heavy rains in Tamil Nadu which have claimed more than 80 lives PHOTO V RAMESH

Britain urges Cypriots to end arms race

Chris Drake in Nicosia and Ian Black in London

MALCOLM RIFKIND, the British Foreign Secretary, told Greek and Turkish Cypriots on Monday that it was their responsibility to find a solution to the problems of the divided island, and warned that greater militarisation could defeat efforts to start peace talks.

Speaking at the end of a brief visit to Nicosia, he said the number of troops and weapons on the island was "dangerously high" and out of all proportion to either side's defence requirements.

Mr Rifkind, the first foreign secretary to visit Cyprus since independence from Britain in 1960, brought no new initiatives for reuniting the island, divided since Turkey invaded in 1974, but he offered a 10-point plan for building confidence.

"I sense there is a view in both communities that 1997 is a crucial year that could mark radical progress or be a massive lost opportunity," he said after meeting the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash.

Outlining his 10 points, Mr Rifkind said the boundaries of a future Cypriot federation should not follow the present ceasefire line, and called on the two sides to take steps to encourage mutual confidence.

Mr Rifkind stood firm on his determination to meet President Glafcos Clerides and Mr Denktash and said the separate meetings had given him a clearer idea of the two sides' feelings and aspirations.

For Mr Denktash in particular, entertaining a British minister in the Turkish-occupied north was a coup, although he criticised British suggestions that Cyprus's talks on accession to the European Union in 1998 could be used to persuade Greeks and Turks to reach a quick agreement.

Mr Denktash also said he had been ready for face-to-face talks with Mr Clerides for many months, as the international community has urged, but Mr Clerides had refused to attend a meeting. The Cyprus government says it wants to see progress first and will not join talks for the sake of public appearances.

Britain and foreign powers are worried by the intercommunal violence, and by the Greek Cypriots' determination to buy weapons to match those held on the Turkish part of the island and the Turkish mainland.

After many years in which the Cyprus problem failed to arouse foreign interest, the threat of a war that would involve Greece and Turkey, both Nato members, has at last attracted world attention.

The Week

A RECORD 250,000 people marched through the Serbian capital, Belgrade, on Monday, in the continuing protest against alleged government election fraud and in opposition to President Milosevic.

BELGIANS are braced for further revelations in the child sex scandal that has horrified the country, as police search for more bodies of children at a disused coal mine near Charleroi.

AIR SAFETY officials were at odds and airline companies in confusion after senior investigators into the TWA 800 crash flatly contradicted their bosses' claim that a fuel system was the most likely cause of the accident off New York in July, which killed all 230 people on board.

Washington Post, page 11

INDIA and Bangladesh signed a new treaty to share water from the Ganges river. The leaders hailed the agreement as a stepping stone to improved relations between the two countries.

BRITAIN called on Greece to end the protests by farmers and deal swiftly with compensation claims by UK lorry drivers trapped in the road blockades.

THE DEATH toll of people wounded in fighting between rival factions in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, stood at more than 100 on Tuesday.

NINE Indonesian democratic activists and a trade union leader went on trial charged with trying to subvert President Suharto's regime.

NEW ZEALAND'S prime minister, Jim Bolger, named four women and three Maori to his cabinet, days after his conservative National Party formed a coalition with the populist New Zealand First party.

THREE cabinet ministers and a deputy minister are among 60 members of the ruling African National Congress who have applied for amnesty to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Washington Post, page 12

THE leading Kenyan dissident Koigi wa Wamwere has been freed on bail from prison on health grounds and allowed to seek medical treatment abroad.

A ONE-DAY strike by civil servants protesting against government plans to impose a pay freeze threw Spain into chaos last week.

THE Red Cross suspended work in Chechenia after six workers, all of them foreigners, were murdered in their sleep in Novye Atagi. The 14 remaining staff are to be evacuated.

Burmese students risk wrath of junta

EYEWITNESS
Minka Nijhuis

"THE MEDIA exaggerate the situation," claimed the interrogators who took me off to the headquarters of the Immigration Office in the Burmese capital, Rangoon.

"There is only a very small problem in Burma and there are very few students involved, but the foreign media turn it into something big. This is bad for Burma's image abroad," declared a plainclothes policeman, who declined to disclose his name or rank.

What has been whispered for months, and hoped for by many, has come to pass. For days, students have demonstrated in the streets and on the campuses of Rangoon.

In the eyes of my interrogator, I read anger that CNN had managed to report the demonstrations. Was I one of those who took pictures of, or filmed, the protest? As the hours passed, he refused to take "no" for an answer. The tone fluctuated from the politely apologetic to the intimidating and hostile.

It took three hours before the decision was taken to deport me immediately. Back in Bangkok, I found out that three other journalists had been deported for entering the country on tourist visas.

For the first time since 1988, students have taken to the streets in large numbers. The Lon Htein, the dreaded riot police, and soldiers with guns have been posted on the roads. But the students continue to make their protests heard.

On Friday last week about 500 sat down at the intersection near the campus of Rangoon university. They were joined by 1,500 bystanders, many of whom expressed their support. Memories of the 1988 uprising, and the brutal way in which the military cracked down on the protesters, were revived.

Passionate speakers took turns to express their demands as they clasped portraits of General Aung San, hero of Burma's independence struggle and father of Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy. They demanded the release of students still being detained and the right to establish an independent students' union. "These are demands about students' affairs, but actually this is all about democracy," said a physics student. "We want freedom for all the people in Burma," added his friend.

The tension rose as it became clear the army and riot police had blocked all roads leading to the junction. "How should I spell violence?" asked a student who was writing out a placard addressed to the United Nations. It said the State Law and Order Restoration Council (Slorc) was "trying to use violence against students striking peacefully. Please help us".

The authorities set an ultimatum. The troops took their positions. The number of students had dropped drastically. They were a vulnerable group, this cluster of 150 students facing hundreds of armed troops and riot police with batons and shields. Their faces were lit by the flickering light of candles, and the chanting of prayers filled the night.

A crowd gathered on balconies nearby. They sang songs and shouted at the troops. At 3.15am the troops advanced and minutes later the students were dragged into trucks and driven towards an uncertain future. Then the eerie sound of sweepers filled the air, brushing away whatever evidence remained.

It is too early to say whether the demonstrations will lead to another major uprising, or how Slorc will respond to that. However, many foreign residents in Rangoon express concern over what they see as the authorities' tougher stand against any form of opposition.

They refer to the attack on Ms Kyi on November 9 orchestrated by the authorities. Increasingly vicious comments and implicit death threats add to worries that her life may be in danger.

As a Rangoon-based senior diplomat explained: "The strength of the generals' hatred of Aung San Suu Kyi is such that expecting them to behave logically may be mistaken. The next step they take may be to kill her." — *The Observer*



A student grips independence hero Aung San's portrait at a protest in Rangoon last week
PHOTOGRAPH: PAULA BRONSTEIN

Nato forces set to pursue war criminals in Bosnia

John Palmer in Brussels

NATO forces in Bosnia are to adopt a tough "suffocation" strategy in the new year in a concerted effort to seek out and help arrest more than 60 indicted war criminals.

Nato foreign ministers, meeting in Brussels last week, were told that without more robust action to bring alleged war criminals to trial in The Hague, the alliance might unwittingly lay the seeds of another war in Bosnia.

The existing 60,000-strong Nato peace force, I-For, has resisted active involvement in the detention of suspected war criminals, arguing that its main task was to separate the warring parties.

But while Nato was reluctant to spell out precisely what new instructions troops will be given when a new stability force of 25,000 to 30,000 — S-For — takes over this week, it was clear that a much higher priority would be given to the drive to capture suspects wanted by the international war crimes tribunal in the Netherlands.

"We will want to harass them and to suffocate them by gradually hemming them into places where they can be more readily apprehended," one Nato diplomat said.

"I would expect S-For to begin to act sooner rather than later on the issue of war criminals if only because there will be a gradual run-down in the number of troops in Bosnia over the next 18 months."

The new strategy was described as moving beyond the present low-key role on the war crimes issue, but stopping short of "turning S-For into a police force".

It will include the provision of increased intelligence on the movements of suspected war criminals, and new authority for the international peace force to follow up cases on non-compliance with the tribunal by local police.

But at the heart of the new strategy is a greater willingness to have S-For involved in the arrest and transfer to The Hague of indicted war criminals. No final decisions will be taken on the troops' exact role until a detailed military study of all the issues involved has been completed.

● Nato governments claimed last week that they had achieved a "breakthrough" by securing Russia's tacit consent for the gradual expansion of the alliance into central Europe; in return, Moscow will be offered a privileged security partnership.

Their optimism followed an announcement in Brussels by the Russian foreign minister, Yevgeny Primakov, that Moscow would start negotiations with Nato on a new treaty, and would drop a previous condition that the alliance must first put its plans for enlargement on hold.

Saddam's son wounded as gunmen fire on his car

David Hirst in Beirut

THOUSANDS of people gathered on Friday last week in the Baghdad street where Saddam Hussein's elder son survived an assassination attempt the day before, in a staged celebration of Uday Hussein's remarkable escape from gunmen who attacked his car.

But there were suspicions that Uday's condition could be more serious than the regime has admitted, and behind the façade of celebration — marked by the slaughter of sheep — Iraqis were braced for sweeping retaliation.

A Tehran-based Iraqi opposition group claimed it was behind the assassination attempt. In a statement, the Islamic Dawa Party said: "A group of our heroic strugglers . . . inflicted the verdict of God and the people unto the enemy of God and the people, Uday Saddam al-Tikriti, who has caused mischief and crime in the land, like his dictator father."

In Jordan, officials said the border with Iraq was closed for several hours after the attack, apparently to prevent those responsible from fleeing the country. Iraqi officials searched cars and passengers crossing the border after it had reopened.

Exiled opponents of the Iraqi regime said that the attack is a brutal shock to the system — proof that in spite of his success in securing a partial resumption of oil exports, President Saddam is vulnerable to the sudden, unexpected blow that one day must bring his downfall.

According to Baghdad newspapers last week, Uday — officially described as only "lightly wounded" — was making a speedy recovery in hospital.

As details of the incident emerged, one report from Baghdad quoted witnesses saying two gunmen were involved. Accounts from the exiled opposition were more dramatic. They cited witnesses as saying that four or five men armed with machine-guns and grenades took part in the attack in al-Mansour, a smart residential suburb.

Uday, aged 32, was reportedly seen with his head covered in blood — although it was not clear, as his guards rushed him to hospital, whether this was caused by bullets or the smashed windscreen. The assailants escaped.

If these accounts are true, the planning involved must be disturbing to the regime — although Uday has always presented an easy target. Notoriously reckless, especially when drunk, he would often career unescorted around Baghdad in an expensive car.

● The United Nations Compensation Commission was expected to rule on Tuesday that Iraq must pay the Kuwaiti Oil Company at least $610 million to meet the costs of extinguishing the oil-well fires started by retreating Iraqi troops in 1991.

Unicef calls for end to child labour

Victoria Brittain

UNICEF called for an immediate end to dangerous and exploitative child labour in a report issued on the organisation's 50th birthday last week.

The United Nations Children's Fund estimates there are 250 million children working, many of them in the sex trade and in industrial jobs that threaten their lives.

In Sivakasi in India, for instance, Unicef found a matchstick-making factory: "Dust from the chemical powders and strong vapours . . . were obvious . . . 250 children, mostly below 10, were working in a long hall filling in a slotted frame with sticks. Some were barely five years old."

Intolerable forms of child labour are so grave an abuse of human rights that the world must come to regard them in the way it does slavery, as unjustifiable under any circumstances, the report says. But, as it points out, ending all child labour will be a long and complicated business and some of the remedies proposed by Westerners have been counter-productive. The 1992 Harkin Bill introduced in the US Congress aiming to prohibit the import of products made by children under 15 is a case in point.

Although the bill never reached the statute books, the threat of it caused panic in Bangladesh's clothes industry and dozens of child workers were dismissed. The children, mostly girls, were traced and found to have moved on to more dangerous and exploitative workshops, or to have become prostitutes.

The report emphasises that child labour is mainly a product of poverty, and many surveys have shown that children's work is often essential to keeping the family just self-sufficient.

But the report draws a sharp distinction between dangerous work and more traditional labour, such as on family farms. New areas of child labour of the most exploitative kind have recently opened up in eastern Europe as living standards have plummeted, while in the United States, immigrant and ethnic minority children have been found working in fields wet with pesticides.

Unicef's priority is to press governments to provide free and compulsory education and to urge donors to tackle the economic pressures that have forced developing countries to cut education budgets.

Out of school

Children of primary school age not attending school, %

Developing world

Developed world 1%

World

Source: UNICEF

Cracks appear in Manila peace plan

Owen Bowcott in Cotabato

SECESSIONIST Muslim rebels in the Philippines are training a new generation of fighters in mountain jungle camps around the western part of the island of Mindanao, despite the peace accord in September with the government of the mainly Catholic country.

In Cotabato, the administrative headquarters of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Armm), children as young as 15 are being recruited for military service by the largest remaining insurgent group.

Three months into the peace process, however, the war that lasted for more than 25 years has stalled to a political stand-off. Sporadic violence is interspersed with waves of kidnappings to raise funds.

On the streets of Cotabato, Philippine army patrols and checkpoints remain in evidence, while Cobra helicopters line the airport perimeter. The province's slogan may be "Land of Peace and Tranquillity" — but Cotabato's mayor entrusts his safety to five heavily armed bodyguards.

Under the terms of the settlement, the largest rebel faction, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), agreed to end its military campaign. Its long-serving leader, Nur Misuari, became governor of the Armm and chairman of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development.

The breakaway Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Milf), which demands an independent Muslim state in Mindanao and claims to have up to 100,000 armed supporters, rejected the peace settlement and is awaiting separate talks.

The conflict in Mindanao has deep historical roots. Religion reinforces tribal divisions; Islamic merchants from Indonesia converted the inhabitants long before the Spanish conquistadores arrived from Manila in the 1570s.

The Spanish, confronting their traditional religious opponents on the far side of the globe, dubbed them Moors and began a campaign of military subjugation and the introduction of Christian settlers which continued until the Spanish were ejected from the Philippines by the United States in 1898.

The latest peace deal, negotiated by President Fidel Ramos, appears more likely to succeed than previous ones. It extends the pragmatic counter-insurgency policies he has adopted elsewhere in the Philippines, such as a succession of 60-day truces by the army in northern Luzon and other islands where it faces the remains of the Maoist New People's Army formed to oppose Ferdinand Marcos.

Labour win puts Major in minority

Guardian Reporters

AN overwhelming Labour victory in the Barnsley East by-election last week officially turned the Conservatives into a minority government for the first time since before the second world war.

The 21-seat Commons majority that John Major held after the 1992 general election tilted into a minority with the win of the Labour candidate Jeff Ennis, who comfortably held the South Yorkshire seat, one of Labour's safest.

The Labour leader, Tony Blair, said: "This is another great byelection for Labour and a tribute to Jeff Ennis, who is dedicated to the area and fought a great campaign.

"The government majority has gone and we will continue to pile on the pressure until the Government has gone too."

The Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown said: "This is utter humiliation for the Tories. They have lost the confidence of the nation in every corner of the land."

The victory leaves the Government vulnerable in the months running up to the general election because theoretically it can be defeated by the combined forces of the opposition. The Conservatives have 322 MPs while the opposition parties can muster 323.

In reality, the Tory MP Sir John Gorst, who withdrew his co-operation from the Government earlier this month, would almost certainly vote with the Government. His withdrawal in a row over his local hospital left the Government with the same number of MPs as the opposition parties, until the Barnsley result.

Labour will now press for the Government to hold the Wirral byelection, which the Conservatives have delayed calling, fearful of seeing their strength further diminished.

Labour's win leaves Mr Major even more heavily dependent for his survival on the Ulster Unionists.

The Socialist Labour Party's candidate, Ken Capstick, aged 55, who was vice-chairman of the National Union of Mineworkers, Yorkshire area, polled fewer than 1,000 votes, just avoiding losing his deposit.

The Liberal Democrats came second, but well adrift of Labour, with the Conservatives in third place.

Some of the Prime Minister's senior colleagues now believe the Conservatives could be facing their worst general election defeat since the Corn Law débâcle of 1846, or the Liberal landslide of 400 seats to 157 in 1906.

MPs on both sides are speculating: either Tony Blair's team will engineer a decisive defeat, with Ulster Unionist help, before the predicted election date of May 1, or Mr Major will try to wrongfoot his opponents by seizing whatever chance arises to recapture the initiative by calling a snap poll on April 10, mid-March or even February.

Commons clerks have cited precedent to advise ministers that the Wirral South seat of Barry Porter, who died in late October, will count as a Tory one until it is lost in a byelection. The opposition believes that ministers and Tory whips are filibustering, hoping to delay the byelection so that it can be blended into the general election.



Labour's Jeff Ennis and his wife Margaret celebrate his victory

In Brief

THE number of asylum seekers detained in Britain has more than doubled in the last three years, according to Amnesty International.

SIX army officers at the Royal Military College, Shrivenham, in Wiltshire have been charged with raping a civilian student.

THE controversial pattern of damages payments since the Hillsborough disaster took an unexpected turn when a Liverpool fan was awarded £201,720 for post-traumatic stress disorder following the death of his half-brother in the tragedy.

RADIOACTIVE lobsters are being caught and eaten along the Cumbrian coast that contain almost 14 times the EU danger level of nuclear material set for foodstuffs, as a result of new discharges at Sellafield.

THOMAS CAMPBELL, convicted of six murders in Glasgow's ice cream wars, was released on bail pending an appeal a week after his co-accused, Joseph Steele, was granted bail.

THE London School of Economics became the first publicly funded British college to abandon the principle of free tuition for full-time home undergraduates when its ruling body agreed an outline for an annual fee of £1,000, with exemptions for poorer students.

THE attempt by the explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes to become the first man to walk solo across Antartica ended in failure after a recurrence of the kidney problems which ended a previous expedition to the North Pole.

THREE Britons were arrested when Colombian police seized £33.3 million worth of cocaine from a US-registered motor yacht in the Caribbean port of Baranquilla.

A ROMANIAN child, bought two years ago by a British couple who were then arrested for trying to smuggle her out of the country, has been finally declared "free for adoption".

A REQUEST for bail on health grounds for Roisin McAliskey, the pregnant daughter of former nationalist MP Bernadette McAliskey, was refused.

THE population of Britain will fall more sharply than was previously thought. In 70 years it will be around 5 million fewer than today, according to government statisticians.

FIFTEEN per cent of childhood cancers might be linked to smoking by fathers. The suspicion is that smoking damages the sperm before conception, scientists say.

Retreat over cattle cull

Ewen MacAskill and Stephen Bates in Brussels

THE European ban on British beef will not be lifted in spite of a humiliating Government climbdown in agreeing to an additional cull of 100,000 cattle.

The agriculture minister, Douglas Hogg, told the Commons on Monday that even with the concession, there was no prospect of the ban on exports of British beef to Europe being relaxed for months.

The political manoeuvring came as Victoria Lowther, aged 19, of Carlisle, Cumbria, became the 13th person to die from a new strain of CJD, the human form of BSE, or mad cow disease.

The selective cull will cost £150 million and comes on top of the slaughter of 1 million cattle. The Government's estimate of the total cost for the handling of the BSE crisis — from March this year until 1998 — is £3.2 billion.

Tory Eurosceptics were scathing. There were repeated calls for Mr Hogg to announce a timetable for the lifting of the ban, but he told the Commons he was not in a position to do so.

Since March this year, the Government has made several embarrassing policy shifts, especially its month-long non-co-operation policy with Europe. After agreeing to a selective cull at the Florence European Union summit in June, the Government reneged on this in September, suspending the cull on the basis of what it claimed was new scientific advice.

Mr Hogg admitted that the reason for the cull was political, to try to re-establish confidence in British beef abroad. He also hinted that herds in Northern Ireland could be first in line for export, because a computerised scheme in operation there makes it easier to trace cattle.

Tories win test votes on fishing policy

Michael White

JOHN MAJOR survived the first test of his minority administration on Monday when the Tories clung on in a crucial fishing policy vote after a day of behind-the-scenes deals.

A Labour amendment was defeated by 316 votes to 305 following moves by the Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind to confirm assurances that Britain would hold out over plans by other EU states to modernise the Community unless the quota-hopping rules were changed.

The amendment claimed ministers had not done enough to protect the hard-pressed industry.

Along with key concessions to Northern Irish fishermen, the move was enough to overturn a defeat over fisheries policy suffered by the Government exactly one year ago. After fears that the Government's victory would be only a slim one, the nine Ulster Unionists abstained, along with the Tory rebel, Sir John Gorst, in his first act of parliamentary defiance.

Terry Dicks, the Conservative MP for Hayes and Harlington, who was offended by comments made by the Prime Minister last week, also abstained.

Seven of the so-called Westminster Eight — the MPs who had the whip suspended after voting against the Government over EU spending — voted with the Government.

In a second vote, the Government's motion supporting ministers' intention to "negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for British fishermen" was carried by 316 to 304, a government majority of 12.

The two results meant that Labour's plans for a motion of no confidence in the Government — had it won — were postponed, leaving the Tory administration stumbling into the new year.

Scots, Irish and West Country fishermen are incensed by what they see as unfair quota-hopping by EU states, notably Spain, and unfair restrictions on their own fishing rights in the name of conservation.

Ministers promised to use international quota swaps to help the province's fishermen to compensate for past losses as a result of an EU arrangement, the Hague Preference.

Refugee grants halved

Alan Travis

THE Home Secretary, Michael Howard, is to cut by half the official funding to organisations which help the reception and settlement of refugees.

The Home Office confirmed on Monday that organisations, including the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, the Kent Committee for the Welfare of Migrants, the Scottish Refugee Council, the Ockenden Venture and the Refugee Arrivals Project, face cuts in their official grants.

"No final decisions have been taken," said a Home Office spokesman. "But we have never indicated to such organisations that they should rely entirely on government funding."

The expected decision to cut the £3.4 million annual grant, pencilled in from next April, by £1.5 million, will have a damaging impact on the work of refugee groups.

Most of the groups have been involved in the Government's programme to accept and help settle 1,500 Bosnian evacuees.

The cut was widely seen as politically vindictive as it follows two High Court defeats for the Government over its attempt to deny welfare benefits to those who fail to apply for asylum as soon as they arrive.

The shadow home secretary, Jack Straw, said such a decision would be outrageous, especially as the Government had just added to the burden on refugee groups in the new asylum legislation.

Nick Hardwick, chief executive of the Refugee Council, the national refugee organisation, said a cut in their £1.1 million Home Office grant would make it very difficult for it to function.

"This is absolutely outrageous. It is days before Christmas. Having cut the entitlement of asylum seekers to benefits, we have struggled to provide people with a roof over their heads and something to eat. "The consequences would be devastating. We hope even at this late stage they will pull back."

Ire over rail sweetener

PRIVATISED companies buying up British Rail are to share a £500 million windfall from the old BR pension fund, the campaign group Save Our Railways claimed on Monday, *writes Keith Harper*.

It said the Government was planning to approve this "huge" surplus from the fund as a sweetener for the firms buying rail passenger franchises. The group said each company would receive a share of the surplus and would be free to use the windfall to increase profits.

Although the pensions of retired staff are safe, there is nothing to prevent privatised rail firms from using the surplus to take a pensions contribution holiday, the group said. Its coordinator, Jonathan Bray said: "We are outraged to learn that the Government is prepared to allow pension fund surpluses to be raided in order to line the pockets of privatised rail companies [in] the kind of scam Robert Maxwell would be proud of."

'Dissembling' Willetts quits

David Hencke

JOHN MAJOR'S disaster-prone government last week suffered yet another blow when high-flying minister David Willetts unexpectedly quit his post as Paymaster General after a damning report accused him of effectively lying to a parliamentary inquiry over his role in the "cash-for-questions" scandal.

Mr Willetts, who received a tax-free £8,000 on resigning, is the third ministerial casualty of the affair, revealed in the Guardian two years ago. Tim Smith, Northern Ireland minister, and Neil Hamilton, trade and industry minister, both resigned after they were accused of accepting money to ask parliamentary questions. Mr Willetts's resignation came only days after Mr Major's stricken government lost its majority in the Commons.

Mr Willetts, Paymaster General for only five months, decided to go after a powerful Commons committee accused him of "dissembling" — misleading MPs and giving untrustworthy evidence on his role as a junior whip when the cash-for-questions scandal was exposed two years ago.

The damning conclusions of the Commons Standards and Privileges Committee said: "We cannot accept much of the memorandum submitted by Mr Willetts, nor much of his oral evidence, as being accurate." It went on: "We are very concerned that any member should dissemble in his account to the committee and believe that this response by Mr Willetts has substantially aggravated the original offence.

"We have decided that, in any future investigation of matters of privilege or . . . about the conduct of members, it will be our normal practice to take evidence on oath."

Mr Willetts insisted that he had told the truth. "I am sorry my integrity has been called into question, especially as throughout the committee hearing I told the truth and I stand by my evidence to the committee," he wrote in his resignation letter to the Prime Minister.

John Prescott, deputy Labour leader, said he hoped that Mr Willetts would consider resigning his parliamentary seat as well.

"This is another example of a minister whose word cannot be trusted and who, when he had been found out, did everything he could to avoid resigning."

The committee's findings follow a two-month inquiry into Mr Willetts's behaviour two years ago as a junior whip after the Guardian revealed that ministers Neil Hamilton and Tim Smith had received cash from Mohamed Al Fayed, the Harrods owner, for asking parliamentary questions in a campaign orchestrated by lobbyist Ian Greer.

In the memo Mr Willetts tried to smother a parliamentary inquiry being set up to investigate the matter by Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, then chairman of the now defunct members' interest committee.

The memo came to light only after the Guardian had subpoenaed documents from Richard Ryder, the former chief whip, during the libel action brought against the paper by Mr Hamilton and Mr Greer. The case collapsed.

Mr Willetts is said to have floated with the committee chairman the possibility of "exploiting the good Tory majority" on the committee to ensure the issue was dealt with as quickly as possible.

Mr Major promoted Michael Bates — MP for Langborough and a junior whip — to replace Mr Willetts as Paymaster General.

Comment, page 8

Two jailed for bombing

Duncan Campbell and Richard Norton-Taylor

TWO young, middle-class Palestinians were this week sentenced to 20 years in jail for plotting the bomb that blasted the Israeli embassy in July 1994. A third defendant was cleared.

Samar Alami, aged 31, and Jawad Botmeh, aged 28, were convicted of conspiring to cause explosions by an 11-1 majority at the Old Bailey. Mahmoud Abu-Wardeh, aged 26, was acquitted of all charges. A fourth defendant, Nadia Zekra, aged 48, had been cleared earlier in the nine-week trial.

The police said that they will continue the hunt for the woman who placed the bomb.

It was just before noon on July 26, 1994 that a silver Audi, driven by a smartly-dressed woman, entered Palace Green, the London address of the Israeli embassy. The woman parked outside the house next to the embassy, went to the door of that house, appeared to speak to someone on the intercom and left.

The diplomatic protection officer, PC Ian Duncan, approached her, and she explained that she had been asked to return in five minutes and wanted to buy some cigarettes. At 12.10pm the bomb exploded.

No one was killed or permanently injured by the blast, or a second one that night outside a Jewish organisation at Balfour House in Finchley, north London.

It was six months before any arrests were made.

Gulf syndrome inquiry opens

David Fairhall and Rebecca Smithers

THE Government last week buckled under six years of pressure from veterans' organisations when it announced a major investigation into Gulf war syndrome, the condition it had previously refused to acknowledge.

One of the two studies announced will examine how veterans' fertility has been affected and whether their children show an abnormal incidence of birth defects.

The other study will try to determine whether veterans now suffer more illness and try to identify causes. Veterans typically complain of chronic fatigue, memory loss, muscle pains and depression.

The three-year programe will involve 12,000 soldiers — 6,000 of them veterans of the 1990-91 conflict and the rest a comparative group who did not go to the Gulf.

Nicholas Soames, the armed forces minister, coupled the Commons announcement with renewed apologies for misleading Parliament over the use of dangerous organo-phosphate pesticides during the conflict.

Mr Soames admitted that Ministry of Defence civil servants and military officials provided ministers with inaccurate information over more than two years. Those responsible would be disciplined if necessary.

Store sued over lost film

A GEOLOGIST is suing Boots the chemist for the £30,000 cost of a return trip to the Arctic after the store lost the prints of his last expedition, *writes Sarah Boseley*.

Barry Matthews, aged 59, of Rodley, Leeds, took his 36-exposure film into Boots for developing after he returned in 1993 from Franz Josefland, in the Russian Arctic, where he had been studying the soil to compare it with other world regions to forecast climatic change.

Although the film had travelled safely to within 70 miles of the North Pole and back, Dr Matthews's frames of soils, vegetation, the sea and an icebreaker ship got lost somewhere between Boots's Leeds and Nottingham offices.

Last week the scientist, now retraining as an ecologist, appeared at Leeds county court, asking for the price of a six-man Arctic expedition so he could take more photographs.

Dr Matthews had been the first scientist to travel to the part of the Arctic, which, he said, used to be a Russian nuclear base.

The court heard that Boots, after initially denying responsibility for the loss of the 36 photos, wrote in September admitting liability.

The judge, Assistant Recorder Gateshill, told the court that the store wanted a damages hearing listed before a district judge for arbitration. Boots had not realised that Dr Matthews would be claiming so much and was granted an adjournment so it could be legally represented.

The colour of Euro money

A VITAL milestone along the tortuous road to monetary union for Europe was marked on Friday last week. First, and most important from the point of view of ordinary people, it was the day when years of rhetoric were suddenly made flesh — in the form of specimen notes of the proposed euro, which will almost certainly become the sole currency for a core of European countries in a little more than five years' time — irrespective of whether Britain joins or not. The euro is no longer a figment of the imagination: now, for the first time, there is something to see.

Predictably, the embedded symbolism of the designs (bridges, windows and doors) was interpreted in contradictory ways. They reminded the Eurosceptic Tory MP Sir Teddy Taylor that the single currency was a gateway to mass unemployment, a window to misery and a bridge to civil unrest. But to Europhiles the images are windows of opportunity, bridges of reconciliation and gateways to a new age.

The second reason the unveiling was important is this. Even if Britain doesn't join the single currency it won't be able to avoid it. Sooner or later it will invade Britain. People will start to take out euro-denominated plastic cards when they visit Europe; some will want euro-savings accounts; others will want their mortgages backed by the "strong" euro — which may lead to some salaries being paid in euros in order to avoid having to repay a mortgage in a strong currency (the euro) out of wages paid in what might be a depreciating one (sterling). By that time chain stores and supermarkets — thanks to advances in electronic money — will be able to accept payments in either currency. In other words, if a core group of EU members, as seems likely, goes ahead with monetary union the whole European monetary scene will be changed whether Britain likes it our not.

The third reason it was important was that a deal appears to have been struck on the so-called stability pact, which removes one of the last remaining obstacles to Continental acceptance of monetary union. Under the Maastricht agreement countries are prohibited from allowing their budget deficits to go above a ceiling of 3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). That will affect British economic policy even if the UK doesn't sign up because the Maastricht criteria will become the standard by which the international markets judge British economic policy whether the UK is in or out of the single currency.

The problem is that if one or more countries decide to let their deficits rise to 4 or 5 per cent of GDP, then the burden of coping with it would fall on other countries, who would either have to transfer resources (cash) or have to suffer higher interest rates. There have to be some penalties but if the original German plan of automatic fines running into billions of pounds on recalcitrant countries had been accepted, it would have risked a massive social backlash in the guilty countries. To impose fixed fines on countries with heavy deficits by forcing them to hand over more money is a bit like treating haemophilia with bloodletting. The compromise — with escape clauses for countries in recession at the discretion of the Council of Ministers — has fault-lines of its own (would the Council ever have the courage to apply sanctions?) but at least it looks as though a formula has been found that may be more acceptable to German public opinion. It remains to be seen whether the increasing likelihood of the single currency going ahead on the mainland of Europe will start to roll back the increasingly hostile tide of public opinion. The answer is that it probably won't unless Labour wins the general election and adopts a sustained strategy for winning the argument.

Protect the food chain

BAD THOUGH this month has been for ministers, it should have been even worse. Yet thanks to the 400 miles between London and Edinburgh, ministers have escaped much of the wrath the media would have imposed had the food poisoning scandal north of the Scottish border struck south instead. Twelve people have died, 200 are infected and another 200 suspect cases await confirmation. The *E. coli 0157* epidemic in Scotland is now the second worst in the world in terms of fatalities. Only Canada, where 19 were killed in 1985, has suffered a worse tragedy.

Like the BSE fiasco, the latest food poisoning saga should not have been a surprise. Responsible officials had already raised the alarm. In his final report last year, Scotland's retiring chief medical officer pointed to the new poisoning agent, which emerged in North America in the late 1970s, and was spreading rapidly in Scotland. The Scottish strain was known to cause diarrhoea, severe abdominal cramps and vomiting.

Ministers could be forgiven for not being able to forecast a specific outbreak. Where they are at fault is in their general approach to food safety. It may sound good campaigning to cut red tape, but public protection requires rules and regulations. One minister — Nicholas Soames — dismissed food poisoning as "a mere inconvenience". Another, John Gummer, expressed scorn over a critical report on an outside catering event. The official, if unspoken, ministerial line was that promoting business was more important than health inspection.

Scottish legislation itself is defective in regard to hygiene training for food handlers. The Institute of Food Research has suffered a 25 per cent cut to its budget while many local councils have been forced by financial restraints to merge their health inspectors into trading standards departments.

It is against this background that the five-day delay in warning the public of the outbreak has to be judged. The Scottish Secretary blames local officials for the delay but, as the Glasgow Herald noted, "he had no business leaving such an important decision to hard-pressed local officials". The delay has undoubtedly helped spread the infection. The scandal is now being investigated by three bodies: a police investigation into possible criminal negligence; a fatal accident inquiry which will be able to question ministers and officials; and an investigation into the disease by a panel of medical experts. A fourth group, a special cabinet committee, was set up by Downing Street last week to look at the lessons for the UK. One over-riding lesson has emerged from the succession of food scandals — salmonella in eggs, listeria in cheese, mercury in fish, alar on apples, sulphite in wine, BSE — in the past decade: the need for a separate food safety agency. Separating consumer from producer interests is the single most important change to improve public protection.

A Hong Kong honeymoon

HONG KONG has acquired the chief executive whom it expected rather than deserved. Patriotic and wealthy, strong but supple, the shipping magnate Tung Chee-hwa fits Beijing's profile ideally for the post-handover job. He would not have been Hong Kong's choice, but someone else was choosing. Given the limitations, Mr Tung is still the most popular of the available candidates. He is, so to speak, the best chief executive that Hong Kong has got.

On the day of the announcement almost everyone was looking on the bright side. British ministers had "every confidence" that he would be a worthy successor to Mr Patten. Of course they would — especially since Mr Patten picked Mr Tung back in 1992 to add a pro-China voice to his own Executive Council. Taiwan sent congratulations: Mr Tung has family connections there, and Taipei hopes that he (and Beijing) will understand the need for restraint if Hong Kong is to be seen as a positive model.

Hong Kong civil servants suggest Mr Tung is a man of compromise. The first test will be whether he can work with Anson Chan, the current chief secretary, who has defended Mr Patten's political reforms. Even Martin Lee, leader of the Hong Kong democrats, has offered Mr Tung a "honeymoon on probation" and asked to meet him. Mr Tung's smartest move would be to respond positively. Both he and Beijing are committed to a "smooth transition", but that means living with the political ambiguities it requires. The burden for failure has shifted from British to Chinese shoulders.

Not everyone is giving Mr Tung the benefit of the doubt. The campaigning legislative councillor Emily Lau says that Mr Tung will carry out Beijing's orders ruthlessly. Her protests are also an essential part of the pressure to ensure that he does not actually do so.

Deserving not a shred of sympathy

Hugo Young

DAVID WILLETTS, caught up in the cash-for-questions affair while a Tory whip, is a luckless victim, but one who deserves not a shred of sympathy. His crime was to do what other people do, engage in the subterranean tradecraft of political management. Alas, he was found out. But, being found out, he became the inescapable emblem of a period in politics when the voters are increasingly doubtful whether tradecraft and integrity can co-exist. His departure is a minimum necessity if the reputation of politics — I say nothing of the Government — is to be revived.

Some may catch here the stink of hypocrisy. If everyone in politics is, to some extent, a fixer, why should Mr Willetts's attempt at fixing be indicted as anything worse than the amateurish effort of a callow practitioner? Why dump on this clever fellow, a long-term asset to the cerebral side of politics, when many more unscrupulous operators burrow in the undergrowth? But that's an argument which concedes there are almost no limits to what it would be proper for politicians, in their own little club, to get up to.

Mr Willetts might have done better, all the same, to try to use it. He could have said that whips are the natural confidants of a committee chairman who faces the prospect of investigating an affair so explosive as the conduct of Neil Hamilton. The managerial question, the subject of his fateful talk with Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, obviously presented itself. The chairman no less than the whip had to be concerned.

Everyone in Tory politics was talking about the problem Mr Hamilton presented. In the freemasonry of the Commons — where every honourable man makes his own rules of honour — behind-the-hand conversation, "without prejudice" as the lawyers say, is a lingua franca that need not compromise any participant. It would have been interesting, had Mr Willetts taken this line, to see how his fellow operators, sitting in judgment on him, would have responded. They would have been hard-put to disagree.

Certainly he would have sounded better than he did in the event. He would have saved himself the tortuous wordplay which anyone less clever would have found too embarrassing to perpetrate, and which sought to pretend that the words he wrote down did not mean what anyone but this brilliant jackass knew they meant. It was such patent duplicity that sent Quentin Davies over the top and persuaded him not to flinch from the role of his colleague's nemesis.

By going now, before being forced to, Mr Willetts does something to restore the House of Commons. The renovated self-policing system couldn't have survived a show of stubbornness. Tony Newton's skilful chairmanship, which produced a unanimous report, had to be predicated on the expectation that the committee's stringent criticism, stopping short of a divisive expulsion order, would be enough to get the accused to do the proper thing. At least some senior MPs, we learn, can collaborate in the assertion of standards that go beyond the partisan. The public will be glad to hear it.

The episode also does a little to support John Major's constant claim that politics are, in fact, clean. Of all that's often said about his time in office, the notion that he has presided over a period of unequalled political squalor is the one he most resents. He bitterly deplored every insinuation about the system that grew out of the Scott inquiry into arms for Iraq. Nowhere in the world is straighter, he insists. And if one counts the number of politicians caught with their hands in the public till, that's not outside the bounds of possibility.

BUT OTHER paymasters come into the frame. The renaissance of Parliament and politics in the public estimation has some way to go. This may not be Le Carré's Panama, or even Craxi's Italy, and the civil service culture still does sustain a public life that is, for the most part, uncorrupt. But politics, especially Tory politics, are another matter. Tim Smith, who took money for asking questions, will apparently be asking the voters of Beaconsfield to return him for a fifth time. Neil Hamilton still proposes to offer himself for election in the Conservative interest, and may well be assisted in doing so by the sluggardly processes of the same committee that last week congratulated itself for putting the squeeze on Mr Willetts.

These are shocking deformities of the body politic, to contrast with the partial satisfaction Mr Willetts has been obliged to give it. Behind them stands the unresolved scandal of party funding. Mr Major and every minister without exception continue to cling to the indefensible line that giving money to their party, however vast the sum or distant the residence, should be a private matter. It is one matter on which there's not a single sceptic to be found.

Late though he was to discover his integrity, Mr Willetts has a basis from which to retrieve it, and with it his career, which he will probably do. In the grand calamity that is about to devastate his party, the brief misjudgment of the young MP with an ironclad majority in Havant will count for little. But until the party sees the point about its funds, the message in matchless integrity that Tory grandees drew from the Willetts affair will deserve all the cynicism it gets.



Winds of dissent stir in Croatian capital

Rémy Ourdan in Zagreb

WITH CALLS for democracy being voiced on the streets of Serbia, Croatia, too, may be at the crossroads only five years after winning independence.

Proud of its existence, arrogant in its detractors' eyes, Croatia has finally beaten back Serbia's territorial claims, and its ethnically homogeneous population is satisfied with the creation of the Croatian state. But the winds of dissent are beginning to stir in Zagreb and the period of national unity seems to be a thing of the past.

President Franjo Tudjman returned from the United States, after treatment for what appeared to be a cancer (officially, a stomach ulcer), to a divided country. When, two weeks ago, Zagreb residents swarmed on to the city's central esplanade in defence of Radio 101's independence, shouting slogans against the "thieves" in Tudjman's Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), they were venting a real frustration that goes far beyond calls for press freedom.

Young Croatians who fought for their country's independence are irritated that their demands are ignored while members of the nationalist nomenklatura whip around the capital in limousines with smoked-glass windows. "Dynamo" is their rallying call.

Young people have not forgiven Tudjman for changing the name of their football club, Dynamo Zagreb, to Dynamo Croatia. One young Zagreb girl complained: "It's always Croatia this and Croatia that. The government should understand that what we want is to live normally and get away from nationalism and authoritarianism."

The demonstrations stopped when the government gave Radio 101 a 45-day reprieve. But nobody understood Tudjman when, after returning from Washington, he declared he was not going to "allow leftovers hankering for the communist period to jeopardise my work of building a Croatian state".

From now on, it is two generations who are standing face to face. "Croatians are living on two different planets and neither side understands the other," was the opinion of a diplomat. The young people who took part in the anti-HDZ demonstrations are the same ones who brandished HDZ flags five years ago.

The neo-Stalinist analyses and diatribes against internal and external enemies that television carries every evening are signs of the government's increasing paranoia. Tudjman castigates Croatians working for international organisations, often in areas of human rights and press freedom, and refers to them as "these characters who take sides with the Devil against Croatia and sell themselves for 30 pieces of silver".

There are more and more scandals: Radio 101 was closed down; the opposition victory at the municipal elections last year rejected; the president of the Supreme Court dismissed; and strong suspicions that the privatisations have been particularly profitable for the government's friends. The presidential office does not seem to understand that Croatia, after the war, is changing rapidly.



Civil society is waking up after five years of ultranationalism. And for most people, the primary concerns are housing, pay, freedom of expression and greater integration with European.

"The 1991 aggression made us lose time and held back the process of democratisation, especially as those who are governing us are men who've never lived under a democratic system," said Milan Vukovic, a Constitutional Court judge. "But there's no limit to our desire to organise Croatia as a democratic state. No other community loves its country as much the Croats love theirs."

Dorica Nikolic, vice chairperson of the Zagreb municipal council, and a member of the opposition, isn't abandoning her patriotism either. She notes, however, that the government is still stalling on appointing a mayor who is not a member of the HDZ.

"President Tudjman and the HDZ think all the credit for creating Croatia belongs to them alone," she says. "And in doing so, they overlook the people's will. Young people, who take part in public protests because their football club's name has been banned or because their radio station is attacked, feel let down by the government."

The short time Tudjman was out of the country has moreover whetted the appetites of successors who are for the first time beginning to speak out. The taboo of discussing Tudjman's succession is increasingly ignored.

"There are extremists in the HDZ, this not very surprising," said Hrvoje Sarinic, general secretary at the presidential office. "I'm the only one to whom Franjo Tudjman entrusts the keys of the country without fear. The president is indeed trying to reconcile all the Croats around the creation of this state, and it is the same in the HDZ.

"There is the right and the left, and the president is trying to strengthen the centre. Those who are getting ready to step into his shoes are mistaken, for the president is in good form."

(December 7)

Zagreb judge refuses to step down

KRUNOSLAV OLUJIC, president of the Croatian Supreme Court judge recently dismissed by the government, is refusing to step down until the administration produces proof of its accusations against him, *writes Rémy Ourdan.*

Olujic was "a paedophile and embezzling the government". A disciplinary procedure has been initiated against the judge and newspapers are rivalling one another in coming up with "revelations".

"This decision is quite simply political," said the judge, accusing the government of organising a "public lynching".

"I want to testify that political blackmail and rigged trials are back in our country. President Tudjman wants a crony at the head of the Supreme Court. My dismissal has been engineered by the HDZ's right wing, which wants to take over the judicial system."

Olujic used to be a close confidant of the Croatian president, who placed him at the head of the special services before he entered the Supreme Court. "As soon as I was appointed to the Supreme Court, I left the HDZ and worked for the independence of the courts," Olujic said.

He revealed that Tudjman was conferring with various judicial authorities "to co-ordinate the political persecution of opponents and independent journalists". He said that he personally refused to attend these meetings, which accounted for the government's anger.

"Politics prevails over justice," confirmed Vladimir Primorac, who was also removed from his post as a judge on the Supreme Court. "Olujic turned his back on them, and the result is he is convicted even before any charge is laid against him."

(December 7)

Economic woes pose threat to democracy in Haiti

Jean-Michel Caroit in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

IN THE run-up to the US presidential election, Vice-President Al Gore spoke highly of the American intervention in Haiti, describing it as "one of the most skilful uses of diplomacy and military force".

Yet, two years after US soldiers moved into the island, Haitian democracy remains unstable. To shore it up, the United Nations Security Council has decided to extend the mandate of its peacekeepers, who took over from US troops on the island, until July 31, 1997.

The fledgling Haitian police force — hastily thrown together when the former president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, demobilised the army — lacks experience, training and equipment. About 50 trigger-happy recruits, who were responsible for making serious mistakes that have shaken public confidence, have been dismissed.

However, gangs of former soldiers still hold substantial stocks of assault weapons. Early in November five people were killed in a stand-off between a police patrol and a commando unit armed with assault rifles and hand grenades.

Two months earlier, President Clinton rushed a 30-man bodyguard to the island to protect the Haitian president, René Préval, after he dismissed the head of the presidential guard, who was involved in the murder of a political opponent. Compounding the violent activities of demobbed soldiers is a worrying increase in crime. As in the other countries in the region, repatriation by the US administration of Haitian criminals — who learnt their trade in New York and Miami — has coincided with the emergence of more violent crime.

And yet notable strides have been made in respecting human rights. Since the restoration of democracy, journalists work freely and demonstrators feel no fear when voicing their discontent on the streets. The bloody repression during the three *coup d'état* years from 1991-94 belongs to the past, but it is a past that the champions of human rights will not forget. Their spokesman, Chenet Jean-Baptiste, said, "You can't speak of democracy in a country where impunity replaces justice."

The big challenge facing President Préval today is economic. The vast majority of the island's 7 million inhabitants is still waiting for the fallout from the restoration of democracy. Unemployment and poverty, which affect more than 60 per cent of the population, are again forcing the poorest to set sail in flimsy craft for the Florida coast or to cross the border into the Dominican Republic.

When he took office, Préval was aware of the urgent need to solve Haiti's unemployment problem, but he has been stymied by the conflicting demands of the country's international backers and partners influenced by Aristide. It took six months of parliamentary wrangling before deputies and senators finally voted to reform the public sector, thus opening the way to privatising nine national enterprises and unfreezing international aid.

The vast majority of "people's organisations" — composed of neighbourhood groups, along with associations of young people and rural folk — rallied against the "neo-liberal plan" imposed by Haiti's international backers. The privatisations are still the subject of squabbles in the Lavalas movement, the vast grouping that carried Aristide to power in 1990. Despite official denials of a split in the movement, Aristide confirmed the divisions by recently announcing the formation of a new political party, the Famille Lavalas.

Without wanting to argue openly with the former Roman Catholic priest who still commands powerful support in the underprivileged neighbourhoods, leaders of the Lavalas Political Organisation (OPL) have given Aristide's latest initiative a chilly reception.

With a majority in parliament and represented in the government by several ministers, including the prime minister, the OPL has been trying to organise the Lavalas movement without, and sometimes against, the ex-president. So far, Préval has cautiously sidestepped any row with Aristide.

The positive public response to the formation of a new group called Initiatives Démocratiques shows that the Lavalas movement is losing momentum. It is also a sign of the will to strengthen Haiti's still fragile democracy.

Intellectuals respected in Haiti and sponsors of democratic initiatives are beginning to worry about what might happen if the Haitian people, who expected the return of democracy to improve their living conditions, are let down.

(December 7)

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
December 22 1996

In search of kindred souls

Alain Lompech looks at the career of piano master Maurizio Pollini who, below, gives a rare interview

THE Italian pianist, Maurizio Pollini, recently embarked on a cycle of seven recitals, due to end in June 1997, in the course of which he will perform 30 of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas (omitting the two short sonatas, Opus 49).

It is a massive undertaking. Playing so many hours of music by heart is a formidable challenge to the pianist's concentration, memory and ability to come to terms with earlier recorded versions of the sonatas. The public judges each new pianist who tackles the complete sonatas by the yardstick of his or her predecessors. This cruel process is inherent in the very notion of interpretation: music exists only when it is performed.

Pollini lives in Milan, the city where he was born nearly 55 years ago, with his wife and 18-year-old son, Daniel. The furniture and works of art in his flat are both old and modern, and reflect his catholic musical tastes, which range from Bach and Beethoven to Boulez.

Pollini is not exactly forthcoming and gives only rare interviews. He admits to having had some serious rows with people who were determined to win him over to their way of thinking.

One of his problems is that he is someone who is widely regarded — to his irritation — as the most perfect and technically immaculate pianist to have emerged since the war. He refuses to be an icon, despite the plaudits he has received from the great and the good in the music world.

When, at the 1960 Chopin competition in Warsaw, the 18-year-old Pollini gave a performance that won him first prize, Arthur Rubinstein exclaimed famously to his fellow jury members: "Why, he already plays better than any one of us!"

Pollini had already won a prize two years earlier at the Geneva competition in the men's category. Martha Argerich, who won the women's prize that year (and went on to win the Chopin competition in 1965), still remembers being dazzled by the Italian teenager's performance.

Pollini gives only 50 or so recitals and concerts a year, and allows his recordings to be issued only after he has carefully vetted them. Now that the generation of keyboard giants born around the turn of the century is no more, he belongs to a select band of pianists who tower over their contemporaries.

Yet despite his perfectionism, which is worthy of Dinu Lipatti or Wilhelm Backhaus, Pollini has not always been entirely convincing, either on disc or in concert. His charisma, however, fascinates music-lovers and fellow musicians alike.

An austere interpretation of a piece of music can sometimes end up telling us more about it than a flashy performance whose brilliance is as ephemeral as a fireworks display. Musicians who set off on a quest do not always immediately find kindred souls who understand them.

In the past Pollini, a committed communist, used to give recitals to help the protest movement against the Vietnam war. He performed in factories with Claudio Abbado and the La Scala orchestra. He also played in Paris in support of the campaign to free fellow pianist Miguel Angel Estrella, who was imprisoned in Uruguay.

Pollini is a great fan of contemporary music and has earned the admiration of Boulez, Luigi Nono and, now, Salvadore Sciarrino. But he is also on the lookout for new talent among those composers who are grouped together under the "new music" banner.

Forthcoming recitals of Beethoven sonatas by Maurizio Pollini at the Salle Pleyel in Paris: January 20, February 12, April 20, May 15 and June 10


Exercise in perspective . . . La Place des Vosges

The intensity of song that rings eternal

WHEN you were still a teenager you gave recitals of Beethoven's late sonatas, which are widely thought to be unplayable by young pianists.

Do you know what my son Daniel likes playing? Not the early sonatas, but the Hammerklavier and the Diabelli Variations — in other words late Beethoven. I think there's a lot to be gained from studying such masterpieces early on in life. What you play when you're young leaves a lasting impression on you. So why not start with the great works. I, too, studied the late sonatas before the early ones, and played the Hammerklavier at a very early age at private recitals.

Don't people underestimate the early sonatas when they claim they are only suitable for young players? Sviatoslab Richter thinks they're greater than the late ones.

I have revised my opinion of the Opus 2 and Opus 7 sonatas. Their slow movements have infinite possibilities. The two cantatas Beethoven composed in Bonn before going to Vienna foreshadow the 9th Symphony and Fidelio — at 18 he had already composed music he would use again for the scene in Fidelio where the prisoners are released.

That says a lot about the early formation of Beethoven's genius. The traditional view is that his works fall into three distinct creative and stylistic periods. I think a more flexible approach is called for.

Pianists worry that they'll bore their audiences if they play all Beethoven's repeats. Yvonne Lefébure never played repeats — she said she couldn't bring herself to play such sublime musical phrases twice in succession.

I can understand just how serious she was being behind that quip. I have no rule. I play all the repeats except the second repeat in the first movement of Opus 2 No 2, but I can see why some people don't do that systematically.

Beethoven himself was always very self-critical when it came to repeats. There are two manuscripts of the Eroica Symphony in Vienna which show the various stages of its composition: Beethoven first put in a repeat, then removed it, then put it back in again.

That indecision suggests that when he finally put in the repeat he did so on purpose. There is no repeat, for example, in the Appassionata's first movement. Schubert was not so self-critical, so one has more scope to do as one wishes with his music.

Richter plays all Schubert's repeats and says that those who don't are not true music-lovers. It has to be said, though, that if you don't play the repeat in the first movement of Sonata D 960 you . . .

. . . miss out some particularly dramatic and important passages in that movement.

Nikolaus Harnoncourt and John Eliot Gardiner have changed our perspective on Beethoven by going back to the sources and using original instruments. Have they influenced you?

Their work is interesting, but I would be unhappy if all the music of the past were played in their manner. If, one day, Beethoven is no longer played except on the fortepiano, it would mean he has been dropped from the repertoire. He dreamed of an instrument which was neither the one he possessed nor a Steinway grand. He wasn't happy with the instruments of his time, but had no way of imagining how pianos would evolve after his death.

He conducted his 9th Symphony with an orchestra that included 19 double basses. Nowadays people want to perform it with a chamber orchestra. I've played on an early 19th century piano, keeping to the pedal markings printed on the score. In the recitativo passage of Opus 31, No 2, the sound was muddy. Some people argue that Beethoven's pedal markings should be changed. I don't agree. That effect was deliberate on Beethoven's part.

It's a dreamlike passage in a more or less improvised movement. But some nuances indicated by Beethoven can't be achieved. It's impossible to increase the intensity of a sound once a note has been played, yet Beethoven requires precisely that in certain passages of the Hammerklavier.

Every pianist dreams of being able to prolong or modulate a note after playing it. Theoretically it's impossible. And yet — perhaps it's only an illusion — I think one can in fact amplify a sound after playing it. There is a transcendent zone in the technique of sound, a singing quality. Some pianists of the older generation had that quality.

Such as Alfred Cortot, no doubt. Do you subscribe to the view that all young pianists play the same way and do not pay enough attention to sound?

Cortot was the very embodiment of that transcendent techique. The young pianists I've heard in competition finals certainly play all the notes — unlike some of their predecessors.

It would be going too far to say that the new generation are much of a muchness. But it's true there were more big musical personalities around in the old days.

(November 19)

Images and harmony

Michel Guerrin meets veteran photographer Willy Ronis in Paris

WILLY Ronis, aged 86, was wearing jeans, a bomber jacket and trainers when he took me on a lightning tour of his current retrospective at the Pavillon des Arts in Paris.

We started with a picture he took with his first roll of film at the age of 16: it shows a group of youngsters having fun on a patch of grass with the Chevreuse Valley in the background — and is already characteristic of his style. "Anyone could have taken the pictures you see here," he said. "I'm an ordinary fellow who wanders around capturing reflections of the show that goes on in the street."

Out of "respect" for his public, Ronis has thrown in for good measure many unpublished photographs dating from 1926 to 1996. They rub shoulders with large prints of such Ronis classics as Nu Provençal, Bastille lovers, women riders at the Zapatta Circus, a barge going under the Pont d'Arcole, and other images that range in time from the Popular Front to the consumer society.

Ronis, a former Communist Party member who has remained "on the left" and whose pictures (always in black and white) plead for "a more fraternal society", loves the "poetry of the streets" (mostly Parisian) and the ordinary folk who people them.

Such is Ronis's skill, backed up by his solid convictions, that photographs which might have ended up being insipid have great substance. Lighting has a lot to do with it. "I was struck by the light on this woman's face," he said, pausing in front of a photograph of people in the Metro. "Without it, the photo would have been perfectly ordinary."

Ronis is also a great believer in composition and, on his own admission, obsessively tries to come up with the most "harmonious" forms that can enhance perspective. He is also keen to press the shutter at just the right moment, so he can capture, say, a flying cauliflower or a wine-grower's guffaw. "To me, what goes on in the street is ballet."

The most surprising section in this exhibition of 170 photographs includes pictures Ronis took in the thirties, which do not fit into the classical mould. They include a curious 1935 photomontage called Le Rêve d'un Clochard (A Tramp's Dream), photo-lab accidents which distort landscapes in a manner reminiscent of some of André Kertész's work, experiments with Brassaï-like cobblestones at night, low-angle shots, and a sensual picture of a woman's legs reflected in a puddle.

One of his most striking photographs — of a woman worker haranguing strikers — dates from 1938, but it was only in 1979 that he discovered it in his archives. "The photo brought memories flooding back."

There are perhaps too many pictures in the show, the result of the generosity of a photographer who refuses to be stingy. Ronis has one nagging worry: "I've donated all my archives to the state, partly out of cowardice. After I'm gone, I hope they won't show things by me that I don't like."

(November 19)

Willy Ronis, Pavillon des Arts, Paris. Closed Monday. Until February 4

Le Monde
Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
December 22 1996

The Washington Post

Israelis, Palestinians 'Slide Toward Crisis'

Barton Gellman in Jerusalem

SPEAKING at the West Bank settlement of Eli late last month, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu defined sovereignty as "having the power to say to those who would dictate to you that they cannot dictate to you, that you have the power to resist."

Israel, he said, has that power now, and Palestinians must never acquire it. And with those words he may have put his finger on what is going wrong with the historic experiment in compromise between the Israeli and Palestinian national dreams.

Netanyahu is determined to impose his will on several questions that the Palestinians see as central to their future, most notably the status of East Jerusalem and the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat aims to demonstrate that the Palestinians, sovereign or not, have ample "power to resist."

If a return to confrontation is coming, as many signs now suggest, it has its roots in that basic difference of outlook. It is not only that their negotiations are in a deadlock, or that the six-month-old Netanyahu government shares no common view with Arafat on the ultimate peace they seek.

The deeper question, and the one over which the two sides are now struggling, is whether negotiations will decide the important questions at all.

The Netanyahu government's decision last week on settlements in the West Bank raised that question again. The cabinet voted to transfer substantial government resources to Jewish settlers and those who join them in the West Bank, designating new building in the occupied territories an "A-level national priority."

Michael Eitan, chief of the Likud party faction in parliament, summarized his government's position: "We are interested in a peace agreement with the Palestinians," he said, "but we demand that the Palestinian side understand that settlements will remain, building in the settlements will continue, and there will be a place for settlements, for Palestinians and for peace."

There is little chance that Palestinians will accept their place in that scheme, or any of several other positions that Netanyahu's government now defines as absolute: no compromise on East Jerusalem, no return of Palestinian refugees from the wars that dislodged them and no independent Palestinian homeland.

The previous Labor Party government, under prime ministers Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, was willing to negotiate on all of those things and be creative about finessing them when it could. Netanyahu, however, appears to be more interested in drawing lines and making good on campaign promises to show the Palestinians who is boss.

"We are sliding quickly toward a crisis, more than a crisis, in fact," said Khalil Shikaki, who heads the Palestine Center for Research and Studies and is usually something of an optimist about Israeli-Palestinian peace. Israel's insistence that settlement is not negotiable, he said, "is convincing Palestinians that this is something they can do absolutely nothing about peacefully."

Arafat's self-rule cabinet, meeting in Gaza City into the early-morning hours last Saturday, responded to the new Israeli policy on settlements with a call for "the masses everywhere to firmly confront with all possible means the Israeli settlement aggression in order to defend the land."

The last such throwing down of the gauntlet was in September, when Netanyahu unilaterally opened a tunnel running alongside Jerusalem's Temple Mount, a site central to Islam and Judaism alike. It was seen, and intended to be seen, as a declaration of Israel's sole sovereignty over the holy city.

Young Palestinians responded with rock-throwing demonstrations. Israeli soldiers fired on the demonstrators. Palestinian police fired at the Israeli soldiers, and four days of street combat left more than 70 people dead.

That tunnel is still open at both ends, including the new entrance opened against the will of the Palestinian Muslim administrators of the Temple Mount. But few Israelis, and few members of Netanyahu's cabinet, are willing to argue that it was worth the cost: an Arab world reunified in condemnation of Israel, a major loss of tourism, and chilling relations between Israel and world leaders who had embraced it only months before.

Israel's security services, as they did in September, are leaking reports to trusted reporters that they have warned Netanyahu against unilateral action. Israeli television reported last week that Shin Bet internal security service chief Ami Ayalon dissented from the new settlements policy, telling Netanyahu sharply: "If you say 'settlements,' you've said war."

Arafat, for his part, is mixing defiance with signals that he is willing to cooperate when asked. After gunmen killed two settlers — a woman and her 12-year-old son — near Bet El, then fled to Ramallah last week, Arafat invited Israeli forensic experts to the self-ruled city to identify their getaway car. His forces have now arrested about 30 activists of the extremist faction that claimed responsibility for the attack, and Ramallah's police chief, Colonel Yunis Al-Afi, said his investigators were close to catching the killers.


A masked Hamas member watches an Israeli flag burn outside the Islamic university in the Gaza Strip last week

TWA Probe Spurs Fuel Tank Warning

Don Phillips and Serge F. Kovaleski

THE National Transportation Safety Board "urgently" recommended last week that center fuel tanks on thousands of airliners be modified to prevent a buildup of explosive vapors. The warning came after investigators determined that a buildup of static electricity on a fuel line could have caused the tank of Trans World Airlines Flight 800 to explode.

Bernard S. Loeb, director of the board's aviation safety division, said static electricity is "by no means certain" to be the source of the fuel tank ignition, but is "a very possible source."

The safety board statement brought to the surface a simmering feud with the FBI. James K. Kallstrom, FBI assistant director, said with apparent irritation: "We are not going to express opinions and we shouldn't. We are conducting a criminal investigation and it is not prudent or wise for us to state opinions about what or what did not happen to this airplane."

The Boeing 747 exploded in flames July 17, sending 230 people to their deaths in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Long Island. At first, a bomb was assumed to be the cause of the crash, but investigators have leaned more toward a mechanical cause as the investigation has dragged on.

The recommendations cover the roughly 1,000 747 jets operating around the world and other airliners with center fuel tanks that have a nearby heat source. The vast majority of commercial airliners probably would be covered by the proposals. A spokesman for Boeing said all Boeing jetliners have center fuel tanks except the new 777, but he could not say immediately how many were surrounded by heat sources.

Boeing spokesman Douglas Webb said the recommendations could have "far-reaching effects for the entire industry," and the industry "must have sufficient technical data and a thorough understanding" of how the changes would affect the overall operating character of the airplane.

Investigators knew shortly after the TWA crash that fumes in the nearly empty center tank exploded violently, but have not been able to determine a source of ignition.

The explosion theory outlined by investigators involves a lengthy chain of events and conditions, all of which would have to combine in just the right way to cause an explosion. The tank would have to be the right temperature at the right internal pressure; the fuel pipe would have to be in use, and it would have to be damaged in such a way that a buildup of static electricity would cause a spark.

Airline accidents are usually the result of such a "long, thin chain" of events, in which the accident would not have happened if any one link were broken.

The fuel pipe involved is used to move fuel from the wing tanks on one side of the plane to engines on the other side, a routine practice as pilots manage fuel flow from the 747's five main tanks during a flight. But the fuel line that passes through the center tank is not one solid pipe but a number of shorter aluminum sections that are screwed together, with rubber O-rings to prevent fuel spillage.

These pipes have been known to come loose at the joint, separating the metal sections slightly. If a section becomes isolated and the static charge has no ground, an electrical arc can occur across the gap. In addition, a fuel leak spewing into vapors already in the tank could form a static charge.

Loeb said investigators are now examining crash wreckage in an effort to determine whether electrical arcing occurred on Flight 800, although arcs can leave no trace. Investigators already have determined that the other events likely happened.

Giants merge, page 14

In Brief

A SOUTH Korean appellate court on Monday reduced the death sentence of former president Chun Doo Hwan to life in prison. The court cited as mitigating factors Chun's contribution to the country's economic development and his role in establishing free elections to determine his successor.

The court also reduced the sentence of former president Roh Tae Woo from 22 years to 17 years, and it reduced the sentences of 12 other defendants who were convicted with the two ex-presidents.

Chun and Roh were convicted of treason for their roles in a 1979 coup that brought Chun to power, as well as a 1980 massacre of demonstrators for democracy in the southern city of Kwangju.

President Kim Young Sam has made cleaning up past corruption a cornerstone of his administration. But sources close to the president say that he likely will pardon his two predecessors before he leaves office next year.

PRESIDENT Clinton announced on Friday last week his latest round of White House and Cabinet appointments, then plunged into a range of divisive issues at an hour-long news conference. He tentatively endorsed a proposed television ratings system, passionately defended his position on late-term abortions and pledged to do more to help the District of Columbia.

Clinton made official several choices that had been forecast by administration officials a day earlier, nominating Rep. Bill Richardson, D-New Mexico, as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and Chicago lawyer William Daley as commerce secretary.

Clinton also confirmed reports that he had asked Attorney General Janet Reno to continue in office.

THE International Monetary Fund, in a boost to the Kremlin, has approved the resumption of lending to Russia, citing an improvement in tax collection, which had fallen off sharply earlier this year.

The fund announced late last week in Washington that its executive board would release the delayed October installment of a three-year $10.3 billion loan.

The IMF delayed that installment following a precipitous decline in tax revenue this year, both before and after President Boris Yeltsin's re-election. Many firms stopped paying taxes before the election as they waited to see if Yeltsin would win — and afterward, they did not resume payment. Moreover, the Yeltsin government handed out a large number of tax exemptions, which further sliced into revenues.

The IMF suspended the loans when it appeared that Russia was failing to adhere to monthly economic performance criteria for the loans.